



A report from the Natural Areas and Capital Program Performance Oversight Committee

May 2023

If you picnic at Blue Lake or take your kids to the Oregon Zoo, enjoy symphonies at the Schnitz or auto shows at the convention center, put out your trash or drive your car – we’ve already crossed paths.

So, hello. We’re Metro – nice to meet you.

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The 2019 parks and nature bond is a promise to build on the region’s legacy to protect clean water, restore fish and wildlife habitat, and provide opportunities for people to connect with nature close to home. In 2019, the voters of the region chose to invest \$475 million to continue to protect clean water, restore fish and wildlife habitat and provide opportunities to connect with nature close to home across six program areas.



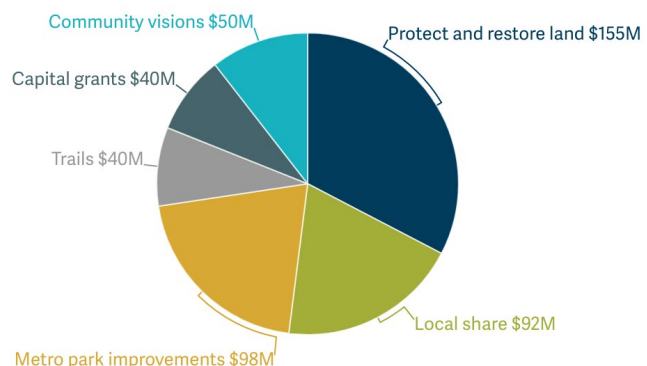
INTRODUCTION

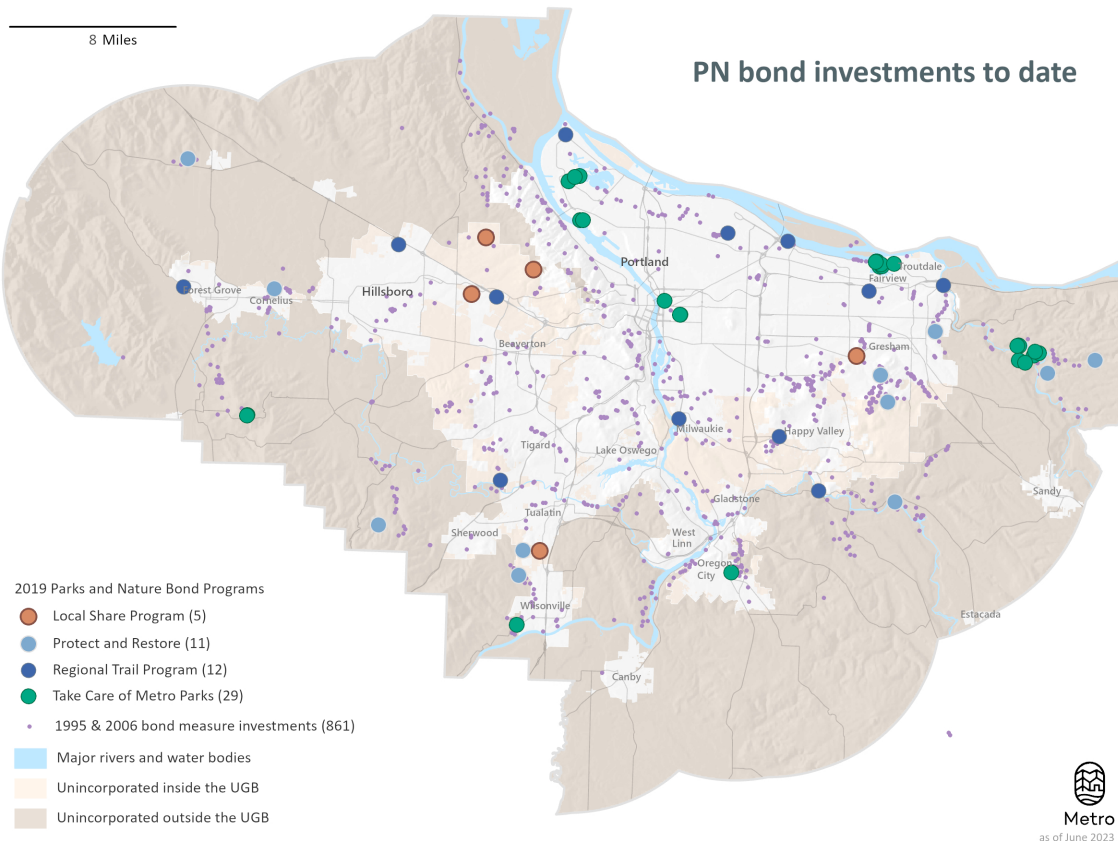
Committee purpose

The 2019 parks and nature bond measure calls for creation of an independent oversight committee to provide review to Metro Council and community members of the 2019 parks and nature bond, the remainder of the 2006 natural areas bond, and capital investments from Metro’s parks and nature five-year local option levy. The members of the Natural Areas and Capital Program Performance Oversight Committee believe that natural areas are integral to the wellbeing of everyone in the region are focused on determining and sharing progress made on the parks and nature bond in terms of management, expenditures and addressing the three bond criteria of racial equity, community engagement and climate resilience.

Bond programs

The bond includes six programs. The funding levels were set by the legislation.





A sample snapshot of an online map tool showing the Metro region and projects currently funded by the 2019 parks and nature bond.

What we found

The committee and Metro staff made progress in calendar year 2022 on reviewing and refining tools to report on and measure bond progress. The committee finds that staff has conducted the primary components of the bond work in a transparent and accountable way.

- All six bond programs are launched and advancing investments in the region. Bond investments are ramping up and bond programs anticipate even more activity, investment and spend in calendar year 2023 and beyond.
- Early reporting on community engagement activities, how land acquisitions to date align with factors that underpin climate resilience as well as efforts underway to increase accessibility at Metro sites and to ensure bond investments benefit businesses owned by and workers who are women and Black, Indigenous, and people of color demonstrates early progress on advancing the bond criteria.
- However, determining the impact of bond investments on advancing the bond criteria will take more time and a larger volume of bond investments to analyze.

As bond investments continue to ramp up, the committee recommends staff focus on the following items this year and beyond:

- Providing additional information about bond investments to the committee will allow the committee to better measure progress and underline impact
 - Maps of bond investments overlayed with relevant spatial data that feature opportunities for storytelling about individual investments and the entire portfolio of bond investments to date
 - Anticipated milestones for bond investments and spend by fiscal year
 - Information and frameworks used to evaluate each potential land acquisition opportunity for alignment with the bond's climate resilience criteria
 - Additional case studies of bond related community engagement activities
 - More interviews and surveys with partners and community members to understand the impact of bond investments and participating in community engagement activities
- Continuing to ensure information about bond programs and investments can be accessible by all members of the public should remain a high priority
- Exploring feasibility of more nuanced analysis on COBID (Oregon Certification Office for Business Inclusion and Diversity) participation for bond investments will allow for better understanding of current and potential economic impact of bond investments on firms and workers underrepresented in parks and nature and related industries.

Process

This report covers the committee's work through the end of calendar year 2022, which involved reviewing details of the six bond programs and case studies of the bond criteria in action and meeting regularly in working groups on land acquisition, community engagement and bond finance. The committee and staff worked together to refine the following tools to help track and assess progress of the 2019 Parks and Nature bond:

- Memo to Council and the committee for individual land acquisitions
- Reporting on additional information about land acquisition including properties acquired by target area and bond funds spent on stabilization activities
- Staff development of a framework that connects land acquisition activities to the bond measure's climate resilience criteria and program criteria
- Staff reports on bond finance and COBID participation
- Initial map of bond investments completed to date
- Brief summaries of program status to date that will be accessible to the general public

The Committee also reviewed the following resources to prepare for the year 2 report back:

- Parks and Nature annual report for FY 2022
- The staff report on bond investments and activities for calendar year 2022
- Quarterly reports on bond progress to the committee



An adult holds hands and walks with two children down a trail at Newell Creek Nature Park, which was created with Metro bond funds.



Three adaptive mountain bikers stopped on a dirt trail to chat in Newell Creek Canyon Nature Park.

LAND ACQUISITION

[Protect and restore land program snapshot](#)

The protect and restore land program makes up a significant part of bond investments, spending and impact to date. The committee has reviewed how current land acquisition protocol builds on the foundation set by the 1995 and 2006 natural areas measures to protect over 15,000 acres of priority habitat through 500 individual transactions. The Metro Council approved [road maps for land acquisition across 24 target areas](#) in 2022 allows the team to complete real-estate strategies for each of the target areas, hire additional staff and begin to increase outreach to willing sellers around priority properties.

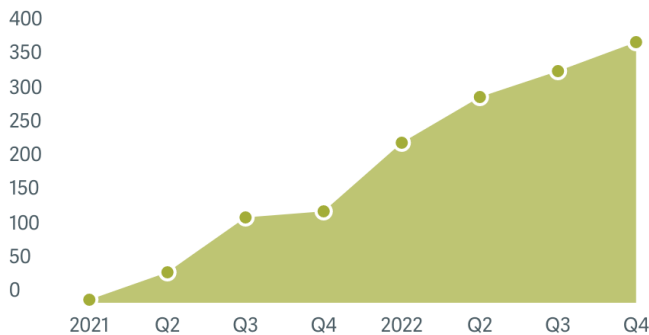
In calendar year 2022, Parks and Nature completed 5 acquisitions. From 2020 through December 2022, Parks and Nature completed a total of 11 acquisitions across 8 of the 24 target areas, spending a little over \$6 million on the properties. The properties acquired in calendar year 2022 are located in priority habitat across the region including the Clackamas River Greenway, Sandy River, Lower Tualatin Headwaters, Beaver Creek and Tonquin Oak

Woodlands and were identified as tier 1 acquisition opportunities.

Protect and restore land

This program buys high-priority natural areas and funds major restoration projects. The 1995 and 2006 bonds helped Metro purchase 15,000 acres of natural areas.

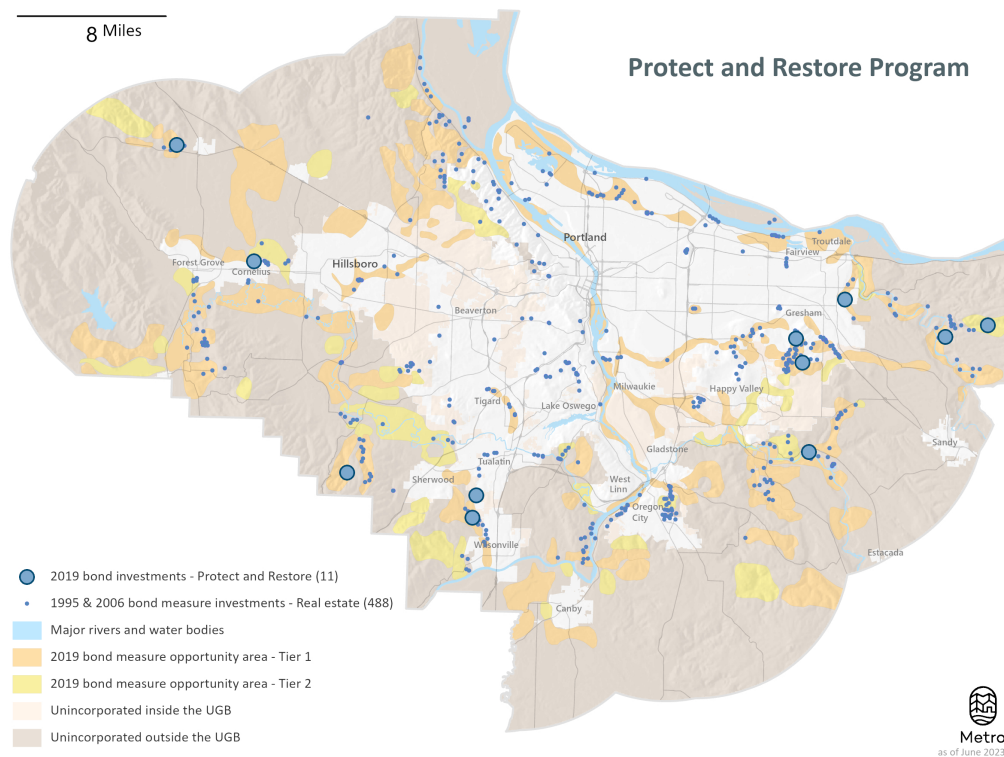
Acres protected



Properties purchased

11

As of December 2022, Parks and Nature has conducted outreach to over 100 landowners across the region to create a more robust pipeline of potential acquisition opportunities. The size of the pipeline helps expand the number of deals moving through each phase of negotiation towards completion, though the fact that this is a willing seller program, the fact that the most straightforward acquisition opportunities have been absorbed by previous bond measures and current market dynamics may all increase the amount of time it takes to fully ramp up the anticipated pace of acquisitions.



From the committee:

We've reviewed how properties are targeted and evaluated for acquisition using information compiled in the memos to Council and the oversight committee summarizing how individual property purchases meet bond criteria as well as portfolio level evaluation of acquisitions to date. We find that the properties acquired as of December 2022 meet the bond goals and criteria, reflect community feedback and demonstrate alignment with key pillars of climate resilience including connectivity, anchor habitat and water quality and quantity.

Moving forward, the anticipated increase in the volume of land acquisitions will provide a more significant sample size to further to understand whether and how land acquisition activities advance priorities identified in the land acquisition road maps and align with goals for the 24 target areas. Comparing completed land acquisitions with ongoing efforts to build and grow a pipeline of land acquisition opportunities will help the committee also understand progress in achieving balanced efforts across target areas.

We look forward to working with staff to review data used to evaluate potential acquisitions and continue to refine the information collected about each acquisition. We also look forward to working with staff on strengthening tools to support evaluation of the entire land acquisition portfolio including mapping and spatial analysis to tell a stronger story about how land acquisitions increase habitat and wildlife connectivity and comparison with data collected from the 2006 natural areas bond.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

[Community engagement snapshot \(excerpts from the 2022 calendar year staff report\)](#)

When voters approved the 2019 parks and nature bond, they called on Metro to meaningfully engage communities of color, Indigenous communities, people with low income and other historically marginalized groups, and prioritize the projects and needs they identify. In this context, Metro has defined meaningful community engagement as providing community members who will be affected by a program or project opportunities to influence how they run and what they create. In pursuing bond related engagement activities, Parks and Nature continues to employ a community engagement approach that builds on feedback received to date, incorporate lessons learned from previous engagement activities and creates focused opportunities for BIPOC¹ communities to increase participation and continue to build trust.

The engagement activities completed in calendar year 2022, which range from BIPOC focused roundtables to online surveys translated into multiple languages and convening external committees to help shape grant solicitations, utilized strategies to build trust with communities and reduce existing barriers to participation. In 2022, these activities and strategies helped shape the following bond program and project outcomes:

- The priority projects submitted as of December 2022 for local share funds reflect and have been shaped community feedback
- Metro Council approved land acquisition road maps include areas highlighted for protection by the community like the Johnson Creek watershed
- The solicitation for the bond funded trail grants was shaped by community, trails advocates and community feedback collected through an online survey ensured that the trail projects funded are important to community
- The guidebook for the Community Choice grants pilot was shaped by the community choice grants program design and review committee made up of community members

The parks and nature bond measure's community engagement criteria directs Metro to prioritize community goals and needs during the development of the six bond program areas completed in 2022. With all six bond programs are launched, community engagement is focused on specific bond funded projects and will continue to evolve in future years.



¹ Abbreviation for Black, Indigenous, and people of color

From the committee:

We believe that the type of meaningful community engagement defined by the parks and nature bond measure goes beyond counting who has been engaged to understanding who has been able to participate in engagement activities and what their feedback has helped shape. It also extends to the experience community members had in sharing their feedback to shape bond programs.

In our review, we've seen that Parks and Nature works to ensure community feedback is guiding bond programs and projects and to use engagement activities to build and strengthen relationships with community members over time. We appreciate Parks and Nature's ability to be thoughtful about incorporating best practices and lessons learned and being innovative in conducting engagement.

We've reviewed information about who Metro engages with and how bond engagement has informed existing work. Reviewing specific examples of engagement for bond projects such as the community choice grants and upcoming engagement planned for the Blue Lake Park renovation project has helped us understand specific engagement strategies and tactics.

We encourage Parks and Nature staff to continue reflecting and identifying opportunities for improvement to meet this standard of meaningful engagement set by the bond measure. To do so, we encourage Parks and Nature to collect additional information from community engagement activities that speaks more to the expansive definition of meaningful engagement. Specifically, we encourage tracking whether community members are staying engaged through multiple projects and using post-engagement evaluation to understand the experiences of people and organizations who have participated in engagement activities as these opportunities will allow staff to continue to reflect on what engagement strategies and tactics have been most effective.

Finally, we believe that meaningful engagement includes ensuring that everyone can see themselves in Metro Parks and Nature spaces, engagement activities and materials. We appreciate learning about initial work underway to engage community members around accessibility improvements being piloted and planned at Metro sites and will look to hear more about those efforts. We also review Parks and Nature materials summarizing efforts on the bond measure with a close eye towards ensuring the maps, photos and written information is as accessible as possible.



FINANCE

The committee regularly reviews financial reporting for 2019 parks and nature bond as well the limited remaining money from the 2006 natural areas bond and any capital investments from the parks and nature levy. Financial data is tracked by Metro's fiscal year, which runs from July 1 through June 30.

As of May 2023, Metro has spent \$42.2 million of bond proceeds available and has awarded \$24.8 million through trail grants and local share program awards. The current administrative rate is about 23.6 percent of total bond spending to date or \$9.9 million.

As part of efforts to better understand the needs of administering this type of bond, the committee has discussed with staff the reasons and dynamics behind the current administrative rate, which covers a portion of overhead expenditures that cannot be tied directly to an action related to the bond's capital investments. Some of these services include, but are not limited to, legal costs and financial support that do not correspond directly to a single project, but are essential to delivering on the bond's objectives and outcomes.

As bond funded investments in parks, trails and natural areas increase due to building a pipeline through steady landowner outreach and a ramp up of construction projects at Blue Lake Park in fall of 2023 and 2024 and more local share and grant awards request funding through reimbursements, the committee anticipates having more projects and program progress to review and evaluate.

the portion of overall bond spend that is used for capital outlays in relation to indirect costs will increase, which should impact the administrative rate over time.

In addition, as of May 2023, the COBID participation rate across all bond investments is 38 percent, well over the floor of 20 percent set for COBID participation for prime and sub-contractors on bond funded projects. The rate of COBID participation for this current fiscal year tracks closely to the COBID participation rate from the previous fiscal year.



From the committee:

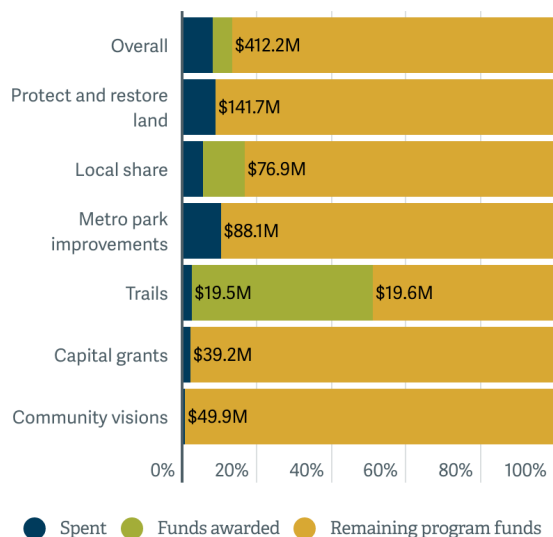
As a committee and finance working group, we care that bond money is being spent and also how the money is spent. This bond measure is focused on goals around engagement and accessibility and we believe it's important for us as a committee to work with Metro to break down spending in relation to how much is spent to support each of the goals.

We feel that the bond spend to date and anticipated spend is in line with bond goals. We understand that administrative cost is based on the pace of overall bond spending. The committee will continue to ask staff for detailed explanations and broader context about overall spend as well as trendlines quarter to quarter and year over year. We find Metro's administrative expenditures to be acceptable in light of resources required to staff and manage a measure of this size and complexity and the expectation that the administrative spend will diminish as a percentage of overall bond spending moving forward.

While the current COBID participation rate exceeds the floor established for the bond measure, we recommend that in 2023 and beyond, staff explore the feasibility of disaggregating participation rates by type of contractor as the first step towards building a better understanding of the impact of bond investments on specific communities as well as the feasibility of analyzing COBID participation rates for both prime and sub-contractors on bond funded projects.

Bond spending

\$62.8 million had been spent or awarded to projects by March 31, 2023.



Two deer graze in the oak savanna at Graham Oaks Nature Park.

LOOKING TO THE YEAR AHEAD

In the coming year, the committee anticipates being able to review additional information and tools that add nuance towards understanding of progress on bond investments and activities.

To date, the committee has identified additional topics to review in 2023 and beyond as a full committee or through working groups:

- Build on initial mapping to further analyze bond investments as connected systems and measure progress on advancing accessibility and climate resilience through parks, trails and natural areas across the region
- Review information on Metro’s tribal government engagement related to the parks and nature bond
- Conduct an analysis of acquisitions from 2006 bond to understand how 2019 acquisitions are comparing especially on climate resilience factors
- Review evaluation of ongoing bond related community engagement processes and projects

2022 OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Burt Edwards, Co-chair	Director of Programs, ReThink Media
Cary Watters, Co-chair	Contracts Supervisor, Portland Bureau of Transportation
Lisa Freedman ²	Former US Forest Service Executive and Budgeting Director
Tana Atchley Culbertson	Co-Director, Willamette River Network
John Ferguson	Former geotechnical engineer
Shantae Johnson	Owner, Mudbone Grown LLC
Michelle Lin	Strategist, Oregon Food Bank
Martita Meier	Digital strategist and project manager, Nike
PK Melethil	Environmental Scientist, TCM physician
Bryan Mercier ²	NW Regional Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs
Georgena Moran	Accessibility specialist, ACCESS recreation
Tabitha Palmer DuPrau	Underwriting Counsel, Fidelity National Title Group
Vivek Shandas	Professor, Portland State University
Shannon Shoul	Director, Procurement Sustainability, Nike
Erin Upton	Environmental social scientist and landscape architect
Owen Wozniak	Land Transactions Program Manager, the Land Trust Alliance

² Former committee co-chair through fall 2022

² Former committee member through winter 2023